



STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305

January 20, 1976

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Department of Genetics
413 497-5052

Mr. Gene Bylinsky
32 Chapel Lane
Riverside, Connecticut 06878

Dear Gene,

Yes, I had seen that you had been named for the ACS award and was delighted to have read of that choice.

You asked me about the reasons why I stopped writing a newspaper column. It would take a long time to go into all of the factors. Many people rather asked why I continued to do so for such a long period of time!

It was certainly a factor that it was hard to find time to do this on top of my other already rather pressing duties. But I think I can honestly say that the main reason was a growing mismatch between the requirements of the role and my own intellectual temperament. In five years I had produced almost 250 pieces on almost as many different subjects. A good reporter or columnist would have forgotten all about them and gone on to new material every week. This in itself was not difficult to do. But my problem as a scholar was letting go of that backlog of material, most of which generated more questions than I had answers for. I became increasingly preoccupied with trying to understand in more and more profound detail the large range of issues that I had barely scratched the surface of. This left less and less brain-space or intellectual energy or whatever you would like to call it for me to do any of my other work or to continue to open up new subjects.

Although some of the issues that I had written about have become moot with the passage of time (for example a discussion of the merits of the 18-year-old vote and the biological basis for the definition of maturity), — that example already illustrates how many new facets can be uncovered by this kind of re-examination and I guess there is enough provocation there already to keep me busy for life-time.

I wrote a little vignette a while ago on the desideratum of being able to forget. You may find that it has some bearing on the present discussion, although I had several other contexts also in mind.

You mentioned that you will be writing about Rockefeller. You certainly have to keep in mind the historical setting in which it was established. For many years it was essentially a unique institution in which it was

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possible for research workers to focus almost all of their attention on biomedical research problems - that was long before NIH made this a much more pervasive capability around the country's universities and medical schools. But I guess for the other side of that coin you might also want to re-read Arrowsmith and Dr. Addams.

Machlin MacCarty is probably the man you ought to talk to who is there now to give you a critical insight onto the roots of the institution's present strength.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr
Enclosure